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New York

President:	Mr. Lavrov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Valle
	China	Mr. Qin Huasun
	Costa Rica	Mrs. Incera
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Gabon	Mr. Essonghé
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Japan	Mr. Owada
	Kenya	Mr. Mwambia
	Portugal	Mr. Monteiro
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	Sweden	Mr. Lidén
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1998/647 and Add.1)

98-85636 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 12.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1998/647 and Add.1)

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Georgia and Germany, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Henze (Germany) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, documents S/1998/647 and addendum 1.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/1998/699, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I should also like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to the following other documents: S/1998/649, S/1998/650, S/1998/655 and S/1998/660, which contain letters dated 15, 15, 16 and 17 July 1998, respectively, from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; and S/1998/645, which contains a letter dated 14 July 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The first speaker inscribed on my list is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia): I am honoured to have the opportunity to address the members of the Security Council.

At the outset, I wish to express our gratitude to the United Nations and the Security Council, to the Russian Federation, in its capacity as facilitator, and to the Friends of the Secretary-General for their vigorous attempts to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia. In this regard, the personal efforts of Mr. Kofi Annan and his Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota, are particularly remarkable. We are also grateful to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for its active engagement in the peace process.

For five years now, we have been searching jointly with the United Nations and the Security Council to find peaceful ways to resolve the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. For five years, a solution for Abkhazia has been the subject of the Council's discussions. For five years, the international community has poured huge resources into monitoring the situation in Abkhazia, as well as into humanitarian assistance to those who have suffered as a result of this conflict.

Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, we must confess that it is still premature to speak about serious progress. Moreover, the recent tragic events in the Gali district have clearly shown that the peace process is at a critical point and requires a new and possibly unconventional assessment of the present situation.

The latest events barely leave us grounds for optimism, and I think that this situation is objectively reflected in the report of the Secretary-General. Despite the concrete proposals made by the Georgian side and because of the intransigence of the Abkhaz leadership, an agreement on the political status of Abkhazia has not yet

been reached and the fate of some 250,000 refugees and displaced persons still remains unsolved. It is unclear when these destitute people will return to their homes, given the fact that the Abkhaz separatists continue their attempts to legitimize the demographic changes that have occurred as a result of the conflict.

This is the sombre reality we have to face. Each and every one of us was instilled with hope when, through our efforts and the personal initiative of the Secretary-General, we started the Geneva negotiations under the leadership of the United Nations and with the participation of the of the Russian Federation as facilitator, the OSCE and the members of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General.

Regrettably, the events that unfolded in the Gali district during May 1998 also called the Geneva peace process into question. In order to create an objective impression about the events in the Gali district, I will bring to your attention only several facts.

The introduction of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation into the conflict zone had inspired hope in the refugees and displaced persons and had prompted the process of their return. By May 1998 some 50,000 displaced persons spontaneously returned to the Gali district. International humanitarian organizations expended several million dollars for the reconstruction of houses for the returnees and for their most urgent needs, with a view to resettle the returnees in the Gali district and to speed up the process of repatriation.

In order to stabilize the situation in the Gali district and to step up the organized return of the population, on 24 October 1997 and 28 April 1998 the summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) adopted decisions on the expansion of the activities of the CIS peacekeeping forces and on additional measures to improve the security conditions in the zone.

The return of refugees and safeguards for their security were on the agenda of the Geneva negotiations as well. Despite all these measures, the Abkhaz separatist regime continued to follow its policy of terror against the population of the Gali district. By means of a unilateral change in the territorial borders of the district, the Gali territory had been artificially shrunk to half its normal size. Punitive operations in the district had become systematic. On the whole, during the last five years, about 1,200 people fell victim to such violence.

The last punitive operation was carried out on 20 May 1998. That day, in the face of the negligence of the peacekeeping forces, about 1,000 *boyeviks* were deployed in the Gali district. The separatists plundered the peaceful population, robbed their families and set fire to houses. Those who dared to resist were executed on the spot. The corpses of the murdered were even traded for a large ransom. In the aftermath of this barbaric operation, the majority of the population were once again forced out of their homes.

Only the vigorous efforts of my Government made it possible to prevent Georgia's involvement in a full-scale war. Still, the results of these events are indeed tragic. Since 20 May more than 60 peaceful civilians have been killed in the Gali district and more than 40,000 civilians expelled from their homes. More than 1,400 houses were set on fire and ruined. It should be stressed that the massive destruction of houses reached its climax after the introduction of the ceasefire. The most unforgivable fact is that, together with residences, management buildings were also ruined, indicating the real aims of the perpetrators: to destroy the prospect of the return of refugees. Houses which had been rebuilt by the international community were also set on fire and levelled.

Unfortunately, violence still continues in the region. Attacks on the villages located on the left bank of the Inguri River, kidnappings for ransom, executions and other serious crimes happen there on a daily basis. Regardless of how tragic the results of this violence are, we are worried by the fact that the Abkhaz side continues to reject the implementation of its obligations regarding the unconditional return of refugees expelled during the events of May, as stipulated in the 25 May 1998 agreement. All this is nothing but a continuation of the policy of ethnic cleansing and an attempt to legitimize its results.

After we reached the 25 May agreement on the ceasefire and separation of forces, our main goal was and remains the maintenance of the peace process. In this regard, the holding of the next round of the Geneva negotiations, under the joint efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Russian Federation as facilitator and the Friends of the Secretary-General, and the agreements that have been reached on a number of issues are of extreme importance.

At the same time, the Geneva meeting, as well as the analysis of recent events in Abkhazia, revealed

problems which require timely resolution; otherwise, the peace process will have no prospects of success. It should be noted that the punitive operations were carried out within the 12-kilometre security zone controlled by the peacekeeping contingent. This clearly demonstrates the fragility of the mechanism of the ceasefire regime in the conflict zone.

Regrettably, our proposals on the expansion of the mandate and functions of the peacekeeping operation were flatly rejected by the Abkhaz side, whereas the international organizations and other participants in the peace process failed to be demanding enough during the adoption of such an important decision.

Foreign mercenaries have been actively engaged in the violence unleashed against the Georgian population. This fact again highlights the acute problem of the illegal influx of arms and aliens into the conflict zone. Unfortunately, even our joint efforts aimed at the resolution of this question are not sufficient.

The developments in the Gali district have proven that the main problem we have to cope with is that of security conditions, since it acutely affects both the returnees and United Nations and other international personnel. The tragic events in the Gali district indicate that, without the creation of solid security mechanisms for the returnees, it would be impossible even to start the new phase of the repatriation. The time has come to think about activating mechanisms that will prevent the punitive operations and help avert the robbery, hostage-taking and killings. To this purpose, our proposals include the creation, in the Gali district, of a provisional joint administration and the establishment of a system of patrols under its auspices.

The other serious problem is the massive laying of mines. Security guarantees would be practically impossible without comprehensive demining measures.

Regrettably, the Abkhaz side rejects these very proposals, thus giving the lie to their declarations about their readiness to promote the return of refugees.

We condemn any action directed against the civilian population, peacekeeping forces and United Nations personnel in the conflict zone. My Government will take all possible measures against such action. At the same time, we believe that, without international efforts and concrete steps on the part of the United Nations, the resolution of this problem will be impossible. We believe it necessary to create a crisis-management mechanism in the conflict zone. One of the elements of such a mechanism would be the introduction of the United Nations self-protection unit. In this regard, I wish to reiterate our support for the proposal of the Secretary-General on the creation of such a unit.

I am confident that the Geneva process must become more viable were the question of the political status of Abkhazia to be addressed, fully respecting the territorial integrity of Georgia, as repeatedly confirmed by the Security Council. At the same time, we should not accept any linkage between the discussions on the political status of Abkhazia and the return of refugees, as has been and continues to be advocated by the Abkhaz side. I repeat, we should not accept that hundreds of thousands of people be held hostage to political negotiations.

The effectiveness of the conflict-resolution mechanism depends considerably on the monitoring of the human rights situation. We should take into account the fact that the Human Rights Office in Sukhumi is part of UNOMIG and that its functions are one aspect of the peace process. The Gali events have made it clear that the Human Rights Office requires changes and serious reinforcement.

All these facts persuade us that the peace process requires a new impetus, first of all to overcome the non-compliance of the Abkhaz side with the demands of the international community. It is worrisome that the separatists feel somewhat confident in the face of mere reprimands and endless blandishments in response to their total disregard of the resolutions of the Security Council, of decisions of the Budapest and Lisbon summits of the OSCE, and of agreements signed by the parties. I am confident that the power, authority and prestige of the Security Council are the only guarantee that the consistent violation of agreements on the part of the Abkhaz side will not go unpunished.

In closing, let me convey the appeal of President Shevardnadze of Georgia that, at this point, the international community adopt a decision which lives up to the aspirations of the Security Council, reflecting the real situation in the conflict zone and suggesting relevant assessments and findings. Such a resolution must differ from the previous 18 documents, contribute to the decrease of tension and give new impetus to the reinvigoration of the negotiations to reach a successful outcome.

I am strongly confident that the decision to be adopted by the Security Council today will meet this very appeal.

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): The next speaker is the representative of Germany. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Henze (Germany): As a member of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia, Germany fully supports and welcomes the draft resolution before the Council today. This is particularly so because this draft resolution contains several important messages addressed directly to the parties, reflecting our grave concern and sense of urgency over the volatile political situation in and around Abkhazia, Georgia; the fate of the thousands of persons who were recently forced to leave their homes; the lack of tangible progress towards a political settlement; and the continuing danger which the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the peacekeepers of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are facing on the ground.

Let me try to elaborate on the messages of the draft resolution as we see them.

The first message is: The fighting that broke out in May was a major setback for peace and brought the parties to the brink of full-scale war. Both parties have allowed the situation in the Gali region to degrade to this point. It is now the demand of the international community that they take determined steps to move back from this brink and engage constructively in the peace process led by the United Nations. Germany is willing to render its assistance to the parties to reach a comprehensive political settlement, provided they show their genuine commitment to the search for peaceful options.

The Georgian authorities must step up significantly their efforts to curb armed groups operating from the Georgian side of the Inguri River. The reckless attacks of these groups are not only a serious danger to the personnel of UNOMIG and of the CIS peacekeeping forces; they are also seriously disrupting any attempt to peacefully solve the issues underlying the conflict.

The second and even more important message we see in the draft resolution is: The Abkhaz side must allow the refugees from the Gali region to return to their homes immediately and without condition. The recent destruction of houses in the Gali region by Abkhaz forces, in an apparent campaign to drive out the local population, is totally unacceptable and a matter of utmost concern. We welcome that the Council is not afraid to address the facts in their proper terms and evaluate them accordingly. It is certainly no coincidence that, in this context, the draft resolution recalls the declaration of the Lisbon summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which refers to related earlier events.

A third and final basic message is also clearly expressed in the draft resolution: the patience of the Security Council is running out. Unless there is an improvement in the peace process and in the security situation on the ground, a reconsideration of the United Nations peacekeeping commitment in Abkhazia, Georgia, cannot be excluded. The last six months have cast serious doubt on whether there actually exists a serious, ongoing peace process which has the unreserved support of the parties. Without such a process it will be difficult to justify the present level of United Nations engagement. The parties are responsible for working towards an effective political negotiating process, through direct dialogue and in the framework of the Geneva process, with the assistance of the Russian Federation as facilitator, the group of Friends of the Secretary-General and the OSCE.

The other crucial factor in the equation is the serious risk to which the troop contributors to UNOMIG — and Germany, along with Bangladesh, is the largest among them — are being forced to submit their personnel. As I mentioned earlier, determined steps against the activities of armed groups and against mine-laying in UNOMIG's area of operations must be taken urgently. But the measures already taken by the Secretariat to improve security conditions, under severely restricted operational conditions, will not be sufficient to maintain a meaningful and justifiable mission over a protracted period of time. We fail to understand why the Abkhaz leadership has chosen to oppose giving UNOMIG the possibility to defend itself against persons or groups attacking it. Germany continues to favour that option, in the form of a self-protection unit to be added to UNOMIG. We call upon the Abkhaz leadership to reconsider its initial reaction and to understand that such a force would be limited strictly to self-defence, with no motive other than to ensure UNOMIG's security against banditry or politically motivated attacks.

Let me end by expressing Germany's deep appreciation for the dedicated work done by the Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota, and the members of UNOMIG, in a tense and dangerous environment. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the

family and friends of Ms. Maria Magdalena Wewiorska, Mr. Bota's secretary, who was murdered on the doorstep of her apartment in Tbilisi only a few days ago. We also mourn the members of the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States who were the victims of cowardly attacks in recent days.

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote.

There being no objection it is so decided.

I shall first give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Dejammet (France) (*interpretation from French*): The situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, is of great concern. The resumption of hostilities last May caused some 40,000 persons who had returned to live in the Gali region to leave their homes. The patient efforts of international organizations in recent years to make possible the return of refugees and displaced persons in the zone have thus been obliterated. Homes have been deliberately set afire by Abkhaz forces. France condemns these actions, which are apparently motivated by a desire to drive these people out of their home region.

Tension in the region persists, and unfortunately new clashes cannot be excluded. It is therefore essential for the parties rigorously to respect the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces of 14 May 1994, as well as the Protocol on a Ceasefire and Withdrawal of Armed Formations signed on 25 May 1998.

But only a lasting political settlement can ensure the stability of the region. The United Nations, with the assistance of the Russian Federation as facilitator, the group of Friends of the Secretary-General and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, is sparing no effort to achieve a solution to the conflict. These efforts, however, can succeed only if the two parties now demonstrate the necessary political will in the negotiations. The meeting held at Geneva from 23 to 25 July 1998 under United Nations auspices was an important step, particularly in the present context. But it must be followed immediately by other negotiations on the major points in the dispute.

The parties must also fulfil their commitments regarding the security of international personnel. Acts committed against members of the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States and of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia are to be condemned. The two parties must take measures to put an end to them.

That is the substance of the draft resolution before the Council, and is the reason why France will vote in its favour.

Mr. Monteiro (Portugal): The situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, continues to cause my Government concern. On the ground, instability, tension and the risk of new confrontations have been high since the tragic events of May 1998, and make the work of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) more difficult and more dangerous.

Concerning the political process, we must note the failure of the parties to settle the conflict. In fact, despite the considerable and sustained efforts of the United Nations, the Russian Federation, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General to move the peace process forward, we are unfortunately still far from a political settlement.

As the Secretary-General points out in his report, the last six months have been marked by a lack of willingness to renounce violence or to consider seriously peaceful and mutually acceptable options for the resolution of the conflict.

The parties must commit themselves to the search for a political solution within the framework of the United Nations, making use of the mechanism established in November 1997. Political machinery to address the various questions of the peace process is in place and the commitment of the international community to the negotiation process is clear and firm. But primary responsibility for reinvigorating it rests with the parties themselves. They must grasp this opportunity with both hands, and we look forward to concrete and substantive progress on the outstanding issues of the definition of the political status of Abkhazia and the problem of the return of refugees and displaced persons in dignity and safety.

We would like to stress that it is particularly important to begin the return of refugees and displaced persons. We therefore call upon, in particular, the Abkhaz side to allow the unconditional and immediate

return of all persons displaced since the resumption of hostilities in May 1998. We commend the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for their efforts to place the Geneva process back on track. The high-level meeting between the two parties which took place last week in Geneva under the aegis of the United Nations was in itself a positive step, and we hope that the parties will intensify their active engagement in this process. We urge them to refrain from the use of force and to observe strictly the Protocol on a Ceasefire and Withdrawal of Armed Formations signed on 25 May 1998.

We remain deeply concerned at the continuing deterioration of security conditions. A significant increase in subversive activities by armed groups has disrupted the peace process and impeded the return of refugees. My Government is particularly concerned about the attacks against UNOMIG and CIS personnel.

The Council should be unequivocal in its intolerance for violence against peacekeepers, which must stop immediately. We demand that the parties provide increased security for UNOMIG and other international personnel. In this regard, we welcome the measures already taken to improve security conditions and to minimize the danger to UNOMIG personnel.

However, we believe that unless further arrangements are made in this field, the Mission will not have the capacity to return to its full operational levels and to fulfil its mandated tasks. We therefore welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to keep the security of UNOMIG under constant review.

In conclusion, we support the extension of UNOMIG's mandate, as recommended by the Secretary-General, as well as the draft resolution before us, which addresses our concerns.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock (United Kingdom): Over a year ago the United Kingdom welcomed the revitalization of the United Nations role in political discussions aimed at a resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. The Geneva process created a framework for tackling the lack of confidence and trust between the two parties and for taking forward the practical issues which need to be addressed in reaching a political settlement.

Unfortunately, the parties have not shown sufficient willingness to use this framework to tackle the key issues. They seem to have limited themselves to talking about mechanisms rather than substance. The Abkhaz side has not lived up to its commitments on refugee returns; and the Georgian side has not, in our view, managed to tackle the problem of armed bands seeking to destabilize the region by launching attacks against Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeepers and Abkhaz officials.

The events of May this year were a direct result of this lack of commitment by the parties. Provocation by the Georgian armed bands, followed by an extreme response by the Abkhaz side, resulted in a new wave of refugees and destruction of property in the Gali region. Both parties must bear their share of the blame for this tragedy, which has set back the whole peace process.

What is clear from the events of May is the close link between the problem of the return of refugees and the activities of the armed bands. Progress on the return of refugees would weaken the position of those seeking a military solution to the conflict. The absence of progress only strengthens the hand of the extremists.

That last week's meeting in Geneva took place despite this unpromising background shows that both sides at least wish to avoid a repeat of the events of May. This is welcome. Unfortunately, they again failed to make progress on the key issues. Nevertheless, the concluding statement does at least contain a reaffirmation by the parties of the Tbilisi Declaration of August last year, which included their commitment to a peaceful settlement.

The international community stands ready to help bring about a peaceful settlement. But first the parties must help themselves. The time has come for them to begin to match their words with results. It is particularly important that the return of refugees should start as soon as possible and be implemented under secure conditions. Refugees will not wish to return if they have to face the prospect of having their homes burned down, as happened in May.

The United Kingdom remains committed both to the political engagement of the United Nations and to the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). But our commitment is not open-ended. Along with progress in the negotiations, we expect an improvement in the security situation on the ground. Countries cannot be expected to provide unarmed observers in a situation where international personnel are being deliberately targeted.

We have supported the Secretary-General's proposals for the resumption of limited patrolling by UNOMIG and for increased security measures for the Mission. However, our strong preference remains for the deployment of a self-protection unit. We do not understand the opposition from some quarters to an arrangement which the Secretary-General believes would provide enhanced security. This option must remain open.

This draft resolution has our full support. It is strongly worded, but asks that the two parties do no more than carry out commitments to which they have both already agreed. The Council will judge them by their actions over the coming weeks.

Mr. Owada (Japan): At the outset, my delegation wishes to offer to Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, a cordial welcome to this meeting of the Security Council.

My delegation wishes to express, in the name of the Government of Japan, its appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Liviu Bota, and to all the men and women working for the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) for their efforts to promote the peace process in Abkhazia, Georgia. My delegation also commends the various efforts to assist in the peace process made by the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, by the group of Friends of the Secretary-General and by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Despite those many valuable efforts, the current state of the peace process is far from satisfactory. My delegation is especially concerned about the resumption of hostilities in May of this year, which again created a large number of refugees. My delegation calls upon both the Georgian side and the Abkhaz side to take a constructive attitude and demonstrate the political will to rapidly promote the peace process and facilitate the return of refugees. In this regard, my delegation stresses the importance of the meeting of the parties held in Geneva last week. Although at that meeting the parties were unable to achieve a breakthrough, my delegation hopes that both parties will remain actively engaged in this negotiation machinery and that a comprehensive political settlement will be reached.

In his recent report, the Secretary-General has condemned the attacks against the peacekeepers of the United Nations and of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Georgia. Japan, as a country which recently suffered a serious loss in the tragic death of a political officer of Japanese nationality working in the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan, fully shares and strongly supports this position of the Secretary-General and unequivocally condemns such attacks. Japan wishes to stress emphatically that the security and safety of international personnel, including humanitarian aid workers on the ground, is a problem of utmost urgency that requires the most serious attention of this Council and of the United Nations as a whole. If parties wish the presence of such international personnel to be maintained, the parties themselves must first of all take all necessary measures in order to ensure their security and safety. So far as the security of UNOMIG is concerned, my delegation welcomes the intention of the Secretary-General to keep this issue under constant review. The establishment of a self-protection unit, which has previously been suggested by the Secretary-General, is most welcome in this respect and should be realized with the consent of both parties as soon as possible.

The situation surrounding UNOMIG is fraught with numerous difficulties. Nevertheless, my delegation fully shares the view of the Secretary-General that the presence of UNOMIG continues to be a stabilizing factor in the area. It is providing support for the peace process, which, it is hoped, will engender confidence for the future and a sense of security among the local population, especially in the Gali district, to which most of the refugees must return once peace is restored. My delegation will therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution now before us, which purports to extend the mandate of UNOMIG for another six months.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): First of all, as this month is drawing to an end, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the outstanding skill and rich diplomatic experience you have displayed in guiding the work of the Council this month.

I would also like to welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia in this meeting.

Ever since conflict broke out in the Abkhaz region of Georgia, the situation in some regions has remained tense, despite the ongoing good offices of the international community. The process of political settlement remains at an impasse. The key issues are now that serious differences still exist between the two sides with regard to the future political status of Abkhazia and that the work of repatriating refugees in that region continues to be hampered. The Chinese delegation is deeply disturbed and concerned by this.

I would like to reiterate here that China has always maintained that in settling the conflict in Georgia the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia should be respected by the international community. At the same time, the basic rights of the residents of all ethnic groups in that region should be safeguarded.

We are of the view that the final settlement of the question of Georgia basically lies with the people themselves. Only when both sides to the conflict have the political will can the efforts of the international community have any effect or play any role. We therefore call upon both sides to take into account the fundamental interests of the people, adopt a constructive attitude, pursue the path of negotiations and settle their differences.

We welcome the high-level meeting held in Geneva recently between the two sides. We hope that both sides can continue and speed up the Geneva process. We await direct contacts at an early date between President Shevardnadze and the Abkhaz leader, Mr. Ardzinba. That would be the first step in building confidence between the two sides and beginning to solve the current problems.

We are satisfied by the fact that the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) has since its deployment maintained an excellent relationship of cooperation with both sides, as well as with the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

We are disturbed by the unstable situation in the districts of Gali and Zugdidi and by the fact that the security of UNOMIG is being threatened. We condemn the terrorist attacks on the peacekeepers of the United Nations and the CIS. We call upon both sides to make good on their promises to safeguard the security of the peacekeepers.

We are of the view that the continued presence of UNOMIG will be conducive to the peace process in Georgia. We therefore endorse the Secretary-General's recommendations on the extension of the UNOMIG mandate and will vote in favour of the draft resolution before us. We hope that UNOMIG will continue to carry out the mandate of the Security Council faithfully.

Mrs. Incera (Costa Rica) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation views with deep concern the deterioration of the political and military situation in Georgia. The renewed tension and the resulting risk of new clashes call for resolute action on the part of the international community to reach a political solution to the conflict.

We would first like to recognize the efforts to promote peace made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Russian Federation, the group of Friends of the Secretary-General and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We are particularly pleased by the second meeting of the parties to the Georgian conflict, which was held in Geneva from 23 to 25 July, and we welcome the reiterated commitment of the participants to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict. We nevertheless recognize that these commitments can be met only if the parties enjoy the full cooperation of the international community in implementing them. We therefore support the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

Moreover, we are alarmed by the fact that both the civilian population and international personnel, including the staff of UNOMIG, continue to be subjected to violence and crime. We consider it indispensable for the local authorities to meet their obligation to take all necessary measures to ensure security in the territories under their control.

In this context, my delegation attaches the greatest importance to the humanitarian situation of the refugees and displaced persons. We regret that the current crisis has worsened their living conditions and is impeding their return to their homes. We consider that above all, the parties to the conflict must respect the fundamental rights of these individuals, including their right to live in security. We therefore reiterate our appeal to the parties to respect the fundamental rights of the inhabitants of the territories under their control, as well as to establish the necessary security conditions to enable displaced persons to return to their homes.

We are particularly concerned about the deterioration of security in the areas where UNOMIG is operating, as this has an impact on the execution of its mandate and imperils the lives of its staff. In this context, we condemn the armed attacks against the Abkhaz authorities and the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as the criminal use of anti-personnel landmines.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the work of UNOMIG. In creating a climate of trust and security for

the population of the Gali district, it is an indispensable factor in ensuring stability in the region.

Mr. Lidén (Sweden): The lack of progress towards a peaceful solution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia is utterly disappointing. The reports of continued violence against civilians and peacekeepers in that region cannot but cause us deep concern. Sweden deplores the renewed hostilities that took place in May, with a major loss of life and a further aggravation of an already precarious humanitarian situation.

Despite the ceasefire of 25 May, the situation on the ground regrettably remains very tense. Sweden is particularly concerned about the plight of refugees and displaced persons. Both parties must fulfil their obligations to see to it that these people can return to their homes under secure conditions.

A growing number of other civilians depend on outside assistance for their subsistence. It is unacceptable that acts such as renewed mine laying hamper the work of those who provide assistance and claim victims, including among United Nations and Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeepers.

The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) continues to be an important stabilizing factor. As a troop contributor to UNOMIG, Sweden is well aware of the crucial role played by the Mission, but also of a security situation which severely restricts its ability to do its job. Sweden supports today's Security Council decision to extend UNOMIG's mandate. We have also emphasized that the proposal for a self-protection unit to facilitate the work of the military observers needs to be kept in mind.

The draft resolution which we are about to adopt sends a clear message to the parties. We expect them to create the conditions in which UNOMIG can carry out its mandate and we will bear this in mind as we review the situation. Beyond that, we expect the parties to show the political will to move the process of negotiations forward and produce tangible results.

Sweden firmly supports the negotiation process initiated by the Secretary-General and the efforts of his Special Representative, Mr. Bota. The support given to this process, in particular by the Russian Federation as facilitator, is important. Joint international action is indispensable for the promotion of a comprehensive settlement. But the responsibility for finding such a settlement rests ultimately with the parties themselves. It is time for them to demonstrate their full readiness to assume that responsibility.

Mr. Essonghé (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): The draft resolution that we are about to adopt attests to the Security Council's will to stem the current crisis in Abkhazia, Georgia, and to re-establish relations of peace and mutual respect there.

In this regard, the efforts of the sponsors to produce the final text should be emphasized. Similarly, the Geneva peace process, launched at the Secretary-General's initiative and supported by the group of his Friends, the Russian Federation and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is to be welcomed.

In this context, the second meeting, held in Geneva from 23 to 25 July 1998, seemed to us to be a hopeful sign, since the two parties were to contribute, alongside the international protagonists, to the search for ways and means to put an end to this crisis. Unfortunately, we are obliged to concede that this goal remains far from being achieved.

The draft resolution under our consideration notes, in its third preambular paragraph, that the situation in the Zugdidi and Gali regions remains tense and confrontational and that there is a risk of resumed fighting. This sorry assessment is a source of keen concern, which my delegation shares and, quite naturally, wishes to see changed. That is why the Security Council's appeal, in paragraph 8 of the draft resolution, seems to me to deserve our firm support.

My delegation will therefore vote in favour of the draft resolution.

Mr. Jagne (Gambia): The situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, is still extremely volatile, notwithstanding the efforts of the international community to bring about peace in the area. My delegation was deeply disturbed by the recent events in May in the Gali district. We are particularly disturbed by the burning of houses constructed at a cost of $2 million out of funds of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). These events led to an outflow of approximately 40,000 refugees for the second time. This undesirable situation is being further exacerbated by attacks on United Nations personnel. My delegation calls for a condemnation of these activities and demands that the parties put a stop to such activities.

The success of the peace initiatives to resolve the conflict in Georgia will depend mainly on the parties themselves. By their activities, the efforts of the international community to move the peace process forward have been continuously frustrated. The two sides owe it to the international community and to their people to listen to the voice of reason. While we call on them to honour their obligations, we deem it pertinent, at this juncture, to congratulate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the members of his team, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Russian Federation as facilitator, the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General for their relentless efforts for a peaceful settlement in Abkhazia, Georgia.

My delegation notes that the presence of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) in the area is essential. It not only serves as a stabilizing factor in the area, but also provides useful support for the political process and helps to create a sense of confidence and security among the residents of the area. As its mandate is about to expire, my delegation would support its extension for a further period of six months until 31 January 1999. If this is not done, the already volatile situation in the area may degenerate into an extremely uncontrollable conflagration.

As the Council is considering, through the draft resolution on the table, the extension of the mandate of UNOMIG, we would like to take this opportunity to remind both sides to the conflict that they cannot continue to hold the international community hostage to their unwillingness to resolve their differences peacefully and to renounce the use of force. We urge the belligerents to summon the necessary political will to settle their differences peacefully. We also take this opportunity to call upon them to implement fully and without delay their commitments under the Moscow Agreement and all subsequent agreements.

In this context, my delegation welcomes the recent meeting that was held in Geneva. We hope that the parties concerned will continue negotiations with a view to resolving their outstanding differences and proceed to implement the agreements reached at the Geneva meeting.

My delegation has carefully studied the draft resolution before us. We attach great importance to operative paragraph 7 of the draft resolution, which reiterates that the primary responsibility for achieving peace rests upon the parties themselves and reminds them that the continued commitment of the international community to assist them depends on the progress they make in this regard. This provision sends the right signals to the two sides.

Also of significance to my delegation is operative paragraph 11, which condemns the acts of violence against the personnel of UNOMIG and places responsibility squarely on the parties to

> "take determined measures to put a stop to such acts which subvert the peace process". [*S/1998/699, para. 11*]

We hope that the two sides will heed the call of the Council.

On the whole, we find the draft resolution to be in the right direction and we will vote in its favour.

Mr. Valle (Brazil): My delegation welcomes the presence of the Foreign Minister of Georgia at this meeting.

My country is increasingly concerned over the situation in Georgia since the resumption of hostilities two months ago. It is with disquieting frequency that deplorable facts regarding the security of the peacekeepers and observers in that country have been brought to our attention. Expressions of regret, condolence and sympathy to families and Governments have been continuously conveyed.

Assuring the security of the military members and civilian staff of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force is the responsibility of both parties to the conflict. Those who suffer the most, however — the main victims of the continuation of the conflict — are the people of the Republic of Georgia, both of Georgian and Abkhazian ethnicity.

Brazil cannot accept practices of ethnic content or the eviction of people by force. Also condemnable is the use of the press for the promotion of antagonism. Along with the role of the Security Council in helping to maintain the unity and integrity of the Republic of Georgia, it is essential that Georgians of different ethnic and religious backgrounds develop democratic ways of coexistence.

My delegation supports the draft resolution and wishes to underline the need for both parties, especially the Abkhaz forces, to respect human rights, and particularly those of displaced persons, who have the right to return to their homes. We hope that the Geneva process proves capable of contributing to sustainable dialogue and reconciliation. The continuous efforts undertaken by Mr. Liviu Bota, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, and the Russian Federation as facilitator are to be highly commended.

The Georgian and Abkhazian authorities have to live up to their previous commitments and cooperate so as to neutralize radical and criminal factions.

The extension of UNOMIG's mandate for another six months is an expression of the belief that a durable peace can be attained. Nevertheless, the Security Council will closely monitor the safety of the United Nations personnel and the willingness of the parties to negotiate.

Mr. Türk (Slovenia): Allow me at the outset to extend the warmest welcome to Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, the Foreign Minister of Georgia, to today's meeting of the Security Council.

The last few months have brought additional problems to the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia. On several occasions since the beginning of this year, the Security Council has expressed serious concern over the deteriorating security situation and resumed fighting, which have made the future of the peace process increasingly uncertain.

The strenuous efforts of Mr. Liviu Bota, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and of other international players involved in the search for a viable solution of the conflict cannot be infinite and cannot bear fruit without the full engagement and cooperation of the parties. The responsibility to move the peace process forward by renouncing violence and seriously considering peaceful options for the resolution of the conflict clearly lies with the parties themselves.

We welcome the recent second high-level meeting of the parties held in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations. This gives us hope that the dialogue may be preserved. The parties should act in good faith and should put greater effort into continuing the talks to achieve substantive results on the key issues of the settlement of the conflict and concrete progress under the commitments they have freely entered into within the institutional framework agreed upon during the first Geneva high-level meeting, held in November 1997.

The humanitarian problem and human rights violations continue to be among the factors that keep the peace process from becoming operational. The situation of the persons displaced by the latest round of fighting in the Gali sector, reports of extensive destruction of houses, burning of villages and practices of the Abkhaz authorities preventing the return of the refugees are unacceptable. Until the safe return of the people to their homes is ensured and further abuse of the population is prevented, there cannot be a viable solution of the conflict. Safe return of the refugees and displaced persons is urgently needed in order to give additional credibility to the peace process.

Apart from the political process, the exercise of the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) under volatile and dangerous conditions remains a matter of serious concern to us. The situation on the ground is still unsettled and tense. Several incidents involving UNOMIG personnel have happened in the last six months, some regrettably ending in casualties. The reported mass media campaign launched against UNOMIG and the initiation of acts of harassment against the Mission, among other things, show a clear need for constant review of the matter. In order to be able to implement its mandated tasks effectively and in full, UNOMIG has to be provided with adequate security. The current situation requires further thinking about additional practical security measures, including the idea of a self-protection unit. However, the primary responsibility for the protection of unarmed United Nations military observers rests with the parties themselves.

In our view, the presence of UNOMIG continues to be an important stabilizing factor in the area. We therefore support the extension of UNOMIG's mandate for a further six months. Slovenia will vote In favour of the draft resolution.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My delegation warmly welcomes the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia to this meeting. We also wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the manner in which you have been guiding the work of the Security Council over the past month.

We pay tribute to the efforts of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), of the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General, of the Russian Federation as facilitator, of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and of all others trying to bring about a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Georgia.

We note that the security situation has deteriorated, which has had negative repercussions of various kinds, including in particular the flight of some 40,000 persons who had returned to live in the Gali region. We believe that such hostilities are in the interest neither of the parties nor of the peace that all seek. The international community, and the United Nations in particular, have made considerable efforts to restore peace to the region. But the parties themselves have not fulfilled their obligations to the international community; this has led to additional problems and difficulties.

My delegation condemns the attacks on UNOMIG and on the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The responsibility for their security lies with the two parties. If they do not cooperate with the international community and with the United Nations, the situation on the ground could further deteriorate. My delegation urges the two parties to fulfil all their obligations and to respect all relevant resolutions of the Security Council. We urge them to exercise the greatest restraint and to take advantage of the present opportunities for peace.

We believe that the recent Geneva meetings marked a path that will allow the parties to return to the negotiating table and to settle their disputes in a peaceful manner taking into account all the interests of all the parties.

Among the issues that must be resolved is the question of refugees and displaced persons. The refugees and displaced persons must return to their homes in conformity with the quadripartite agreement concluded on 4 April 1994. A climate of security and other necessary conditions must be established to that end.

Finally, we support the recommendation of the Secretary-General, set out in paragraph 41 of his report, that the mandate of UNOMIG be extended for a further period of six months, until 31 January 1999. We also support the draft resolution before the Council today, and will vote in its favour.

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): I thank the representative of Bahrain for the kind words he addressed to me.

Ms. Soderberg (United States of America): First, let me join my colleagues in welcoming the Foreign Minister of Georgia; he is most welcome, and we appreciate his presence here today.

We are now in a critical period in the peace process in Georgia. While the May ceasefire continues to hold, the situation remains tense and attacks against peacekeepers continue. The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) continues to contribute to the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and to play a constructive role in the overall peace process. That is why we will vote today in favour of extending the mandate of UNOMIG for another six months.

We are concerned that the parties have not shown the political will to renounce violence and to take steps towards a comprehensive political settlement. The parties must engage in substantive talks on the real issues: the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and the political status of Abkhazia. We look forward to further progress in the Geneva process which addresses these basic issues. We also hope that the upcoming meeting in Athens on confidence-building measures will advance the process. We thank the Government of Greece for its kind offer to host this important meeting.

We condemn in the strongest terms the attacks on the peacekeepers of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). We remain deeply concerned about the physical safety of the personnel of UNOMIG. We call upon the parties to renew their commitment to protect the personnel of UNOMIG and other international peacekeepers. It is their responsibility to protect the peacekeepers. To this end, both sides must rein in terrorist activity. They must also cease violence and harassment against refugees and internally displaced persons.

We appreciate the Secretary-General's efforts to address the security of UNOMIG personnel with practical measures. So long as the parties fail to protect UNOMIG, we consider it essential that further force-protection arrangements be made, and that the Secretary-General's recommendation for a self-protection unit be approved and implemented as soon as possible.

The situation in Abkhazia is deeply troubling. We support the idea that, following the Secretary-General's mid-term report, the Security Council should assess the future of the UNOMIG mission in the overall effort to achieve a political settlement in Georgia.

We thank the Secretary-General and, in particular, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Bota, for their devotion to the search for peace in Georgia. Mr. Bota's active leadership role in securing the new ceasefire and his efforts in the Geneva process, and especially his success in bringing the parties together, are worthy of high commendation.

Finally, let me express our strong appreciation to the men and women of UNOMIG. Their dedication in the pursuit of peace also deserves high recognition.

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

The Russian delegation participated actively in preparing the draft resolution that is before the Security Council today. We consider it to be an extremely important document intended to promote the intensification of the process towards settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

The peoples of Russia and of Georgia are linked by feelings of mutual respect and sincere fraternal friendship.

Russia, in close cooperation with the United Nations, is working for a just settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict that posits the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Georgia and for the finding of a form of self-government for Abkhazia that allows for protecting the interests of its multinational population. Such an agreement would provide a stable basis for ending the conflict.

We are convinced that the use of force to resolve this conflict is counter-productive and could lead to an explosion in the entire rather unstable situation in the Caucasus region. We are deeply concerned by the continuing tense situation in the Gali region. The consequences of the armed conflict that took place there in May of this year have not been eliminated. The Gagra Protocol on a Ceasefire and Withdrawal of Armed Formations of 25 May is not being implemented either by the Abkhaz or by the Georgian side.

A repetition of the tragedy of May in the long-suffering Gali region has once again exacerbated the problems of refugees. We demand from the Abkhaz side the establishment of conditions for the speedy return of the peaceful civilians that have left that region as a result of the hostilities. If the Abkhaz authorities pose obstacles to their return, such actions will be regarded as being aimed at the implementation of "ethnic cleansing" in that part of Abkhazia, Georgia.

The collective peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), in cooperation with the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), are an important stabilizing factor in the conflict zone. Such a role of the CIS peacekeepers was reaffirmed in May of this year, when, thanks to the measures they undertook, armed conflicts in the Gali region were localized and did not escalate into large-scale hostilities. We are appalled by the continuing subversive terrorist acts directed against the collective peacekeeping forces, and we demand that the Georgian side take decisive steps to put an end to them. The need for this is directly emphasized in the draft resolution to be adopted today.

We support the extension of UNOMIG's mandate for six months, being convinced that the Mission must continue its useful work in the conflict zone. We are deeply concerned by the problem of the security of UNOMIG personnel and believe that the greatest responsibility in this regard rests with the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides, which must immediately take the measures that are needed. We reaffirm the readiness of the collective peacekeeping forces to render assistance in ensuring the security of the United Nations military observers.

Recently, with the mediation of Russia, the sides have been actively negotiating on preparations for a meeting between the President of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, and the Abkhaz leader, Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, which would eliminate the consequences of the events of May in the Gali region and would allow for the adoption of a package of documents on key issues in order to reach a settlement. We have a positive view of the second meeting between the Georgian and the Abkhaz sides, which took place from 23 to 25 July this year in Geneva under the chairmanship of Mr. Liviu Bota, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with the participation of representatives of Russia, as the facilitator, as well as of the States of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General and members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We are counting on the activities of the coordinating council and its working groups being stepped up as a result of that meeting.

Russia is ready to promote comprehensively both the implementation of the agreements achieved in Geneva and the advancement of an overall settlement.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I shall now put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/1998/699.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bahrain, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, France, Gabon, Gambia, Japan, Kenya, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President (*interpretation from Russian*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1187 (1998).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.